Transportation Chapter Meeting Summary

Tuesday, May 8, 2007 4 - 6 PM

Central Corridor Resource Center • 1080 University Avenue

Task Force members present: Rob Barbosa, Jon Commers, David Greene, Betsy Leach, Paul Savage

Other present: Larry Englund

Staff: Christina Danico, Allen Lovejoy, Jess Rosenfeld, Lucy Thompson

Larry Englund joined the meeting as a guest task force member from the LOCATE and Capital/Downtown Central Corridor Task Forces and the chair of the Capitol River Council. Lucy Thompson begun the meeting by outlining the major themes of the Downtown Development Strategy. Some of these ideas include:

A better balance between modes	Management of existing parking
Significant investments in transit	Increasing mix of land uses (for multi-
Pedestrian/streetscape improvements	purpose trips)
Increased skyway & street activity, with a	Downtown Airport
focus on reinvestment in the street level	Union Depot as a transportation hub

There was some further discussion about encouraging pedestrian oriented activities and increasing the modal split of people coming to downtown. Resident parking was also highlighted as a major issue by Larry Englund, with the potential redevelopment of the Diamond Products possibly producing a loss of parking near the artist lofts in Lowertown. Lucy reviewed the recommendations made in the Central Corridor Development Strategy regarding downtown bus service, pedestrian amenities, and the preferred LRT alignment on Cedar and 4th Streets. The task force seemed to be supportive of a 4th street alignment in front of Union Depot. Paul Savage noted that overall skyway signage needs to be improved. Lucy responded that real attention had been given to making clear connections to the skyway system, and to delineating pedestrian paths to downtown destinations.

The task force then discussed a series of questions taken from policies in the existing transportation plan:

How would you prioritize City efforts to construct new streets as a part of industrial redevelopment, commercial corridor enhancement, or creating access to under-utilize lands? (Project specific or standards)

In response to this question, the Task Force discussed issues such as the Pierce Butler connection to the East and West, and how to define the changing scope of "industrial" uses. It was questioned as to how much of a role bioscience would play in the West Midway. Lucy talked more about reinstating the urban grid on vacant industrial land in the downtown – like the Diamond Products site. She noted that plans for the West Side Flats and Victoria Park also reintroduce a historic or new street grid. While the task force generally supported this effort to create access to new jobs and redevelopment, it was clear that the City needs to make the reasoning for street improvements or connections more transparent in their project proposals.

Should the City continue its policy of vacating unnecessary streets, such as those platted and unpaved or those that create short blocks, for housing and economic development opportunities? Where does an urban grid need to be reinstated?

Some additional discussion was had about the lack of street grids on old industrial land. Jess Rosenfeld commented that providing utilities and opportunities for connecting existing streets is a good legacy to leave to these larger parcels. Staff also talked about the history of platting and the unique circumstances of some large parcels.

Should the City renew its policy to support freeway capacity improvements that alleviate congestion at the northbound ramps of downtown?

Al Lovejoy commented that rather than emphasize the northbound ramps from the last plan, the vital projects for the update will be the 35E reconstruction and realignment north of downtown, the Lafayette Bridge reconstruction, and possibly the Dale Street bridge. He noted that in the case of the Lafayette Bridge, the piers will need to be rebuilt, as well studying the widening of the 94 approach to make southern weave movements better. It was indicated that this is a top state priority as well because of safety reasons.

What transportation policies might help the City focus or promote public investment and economic development around major destinations and significant transfer points, such as LRT stations? In addition to proposed LRT stations, what are these major job destinations in St. Paul?

Staff and the task force focused on the ideas of mobility, accessibility, proximity (to jobs and housing), and connectivity (including telecommuting and the movement of ideas). There was some brief discussion on the capacity to host the largest destinations, such as the State Fair, Wild games, and Taste of Minnesota. It was generally agreed that many strategies must be implemented to accommodate these events, including special shuttles, monitored bicycle parking, discounted tickets for arriving by a mode other than a single-occupancy vehicle, and day or weekend transit passes.

How can the City better serve neighborhood businesses through transportation improvements? Where do the needs of neighborhood businesses and residents most often conflict?

Larry noted that while parking is usually the major issue, many downtown businesses also now complain of bus stops being located near their buildings, and that their presence may increase littering and loitering on their property. There may also be a perception that larger bus shelters attract crime and unwanted behavior on their particular block. Staff and the task force discussed more generally how there needs to be a greater respect for transit and the benefits it brings to businesses and their employees, especially downtown. The task force agreed that organizations like BOMA should be challenged to help build this culture of respect. Along the same lines, Lucy noted that building owners should also take ownership in the public space and sidewalks downtown in that it is in their best interest to have clean, walkable streets in the business district. It was mentioned that a program similar to *Friends of Mears Park* might be a good way to get neighboring businesses to address some of these issues.

How might the City work better with the downtown business community to develop and maintain streetscape improvements?

Continuing with the same discussion, the task force members offered that the City might use existing initiatives on downtown streets, such as flower planting. The City could also encourage downtown building owners to think of the streetscape as a private investment, encouraging them to think more long-term about being a part of the downtown community. This could be done a number of ways, including a business improvement district, or planned as a 20 year project. In any case, all agreed that there needs to be a concept of the "shared downtown" and support for the amenities necessary for it to flourish.

At the end of the meeting, Larry also submitted the additional written comment below:

Are there critical vertical connections (from downtown to the river) that need to be studied or created?

Yes, or enhanced – at Wabasha, Science Museum, Sibley, and Jackson.